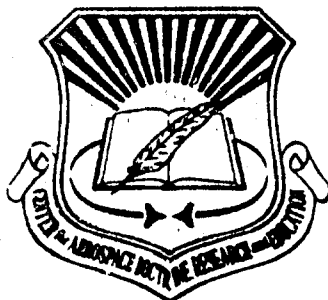


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GUERRILLA WARFARE in NICARAGUA

1975-1979

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GUERRILLA WARFARE IN NICARAGUA 1975-1979

by

Bynum E. Weathers, Jr.



Documentary Research Division
Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education
Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama 36112

November 1983

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PREFACE

This study of guerrilla actions in Nicaragua has been prepared primarily for use by the professional military schools of the Air University; however, the subject matter may be of interest to other governmental agencies. For general background purposes, the reader should consult an earlier Documentary Research publication, *Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1963-1975*, by Dr. Raymond Estep which provides a succinct but meaningful review of insurgency in Nicaragua, as well as in ten other Latin American republics. Readers who want to maintain currency on the topic of guerrilla warfare may wish to peruse books, newspapers, and periodicals listed in the bibliography of this study. More extensive sources are included in the *Air University Library Index to Military Periodicals*, *Latin American Index Facts-on-File*, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, the *Public Affairs Information Service*, the *Social Sciences Index*, and the *Humanities Index*.

INTRODUCTION

Nicaragua has been plagued with turmoil and violence since she gained independence--first from Spain (1821), then from Mexico (1823), and finally from the United Provinces of Central America (1838). The bitter rivalry and intensive fighting between the Conservative and Liberal factions, headquartered in the cities of Granada and León, respectively, was a major cause of political instability and persisted as a festering sore on the body politic for a full century. Since the Conservative-Liberal controversy extended across national boundaries, other Central American countries supported their ideological counterparts in toppling Nicaraguan governments and establishing themselves as the *de facto* rulers. Guerrilla warfare, in addition to conventional combat, was characteristic of this era.

Besides regional incursions, Nicaragua also was subjected to interventions by Great Britain and the United States. The British had established a protectorate over much of the Nicaraguan Caribbean coast inhabited by the Mosquito Indians in the last quarter of the 17th century. The extension of British control over the remaining coastline in the mid-19th century to San Juan del Norte (renamed Greytown by the British) on the Costa Rican border placed US-British interests on a collision course. The acquisition of California following the Mexican War and the subsequent "Gold Rush of '49" served to highlight the need for an interoceanic canal, whether in Nicaragua or Panamá, in terms of US national interests. Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt already had in operation a steamer service

which in combination with land carriages linked San Juan del Norte on the Caribbean with the Pacific Ocean. United States apprehensions over British intentions were put to rest with the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty (1850) which made the construction of a future canal a joint undertaking and provided for the withdrawal of the British from the entire Caribbean coastline of Nicaragua.

Notwithstanding the removal of the British menace, the Conservative-Liberal conflict continued to cause incremental instability and political upheavals in Nicaragua. Beginning in 1855, the antics of US filibuster William Walker and his band of pro-Liberal mercenaries played havoc throughout the republic (and Central America, as well), giving rise to combined counterattacks by US, British, Honduran, and Costa Rican forces. This enigmatic usurpation was brought to a conclusion in 1860 with his capture and execution. During the five-year period, Walker had succeeded in capturing Grenada, gaining the enmity of Commodore Vanderbilt, serving as commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan army, and attaining the presidency of the republic. Following the Walker episode, a period of relative peace ensued despite the rumblings of revolution and occasional uprisings. Near the turn of the century, a ruthless caudillo, José Santos Zelaya, seized power and established a despotic regime which endured for more than a decade and a half until 1909.

The end of the Zelaya dictatorship left Nicaragua in virtual bankruptcy. Chaos reigned and foreign creditors demanded payments on their loans. At this point, the era of US diplomatic and military intervention in Nicaragua had its beginning. Following an urgent appeal on the part of the Conservatives, the United States responded with a recovery

program which included the provision for private loans, the appointment of an American customs collector, and the requirement for party unity on the selection of a presidential candidate. With the continuance of a Conservative administration assured, the liberals rebelled and US military intervention followed at the request of the Nicaraguan president. For almost two decades (1912-1925, 1927-1933), a legation guard of approximately 100 US Marines remained in the republic.

For purposes of the present study, the second US intervention in Nicaragua in 1927 is quite significant in that it provides the *raison d'être* of the Somoza dynasty and the Sandinista movement. Again, armed conflict between Conservatives and Liberals over the presidency brought in US Marines to institute a ceasefire. Colonel Henry L. Stimson, special envoy of President Coolidge, succeeded in reaching an agreement whereby the combatants of both parties would turn in their arms to the Marines and the United States, in turn, would guarantee free presidential elections. The armistice progressed according to schedule until July 1927 when General Augusto César Sandino without warning attacked a Marine garrison in the northern town of Ocotal (Nueva Segovia province), a short distance from the Honduran border. Refusing to comply with the Stimson agreement until the Marines were withdrawn, Sandino engaged American and Nicaraguan forces in guerrilla warfare until the departure of the Marines in 1933. After assurances that a guerrilla entourage could be retained in the north under his control, Sandino reached a settlement with the newly elected Nicaraguan government in February 1933. One year later, Sandino and his brother were assassinated in Managua following a visit to the presidential palace. The assassins were alleged to be members

of the newly formed constabulary, the Nicaraguan National Guard:

The genesis of the National Guard occurred in July 1925 when five instructors, headed by Major Calvin B. Carter (US Army, Retired), arrived in Managua to begin training the Nicaraguan cadre which eventually would organize their own constabulary. Before this plan could be implemented, however, the Liberal rebellion of 1926 occurred and the second US intervention was underway soon thereafter. In 1927, the National Guard officially was activated with US Marines conducting the training and orientation of officers and men. As the ranks of junior officers were filled, it was agreed by the Conservatives and Liberals to divide evenly most of the senior officer billets. The selection of the Guard Commander was the most difficult to determine and was deferred by mutual agreement pending the outcome of the presidential election of 1932.

Anastasio Somoza García was chosen as the head of the National Guard by President-elect Juan Bautista Sacasa after approval by the United States and the incumbent executive, General José María Moncada. Somoza possessed a combination of faculties which made him acceptable for the new position, including proficiency in the English language, residence in the United States, close kinship to President Sacasa through his wife, performance as translator during the Stimson negotiations, government service in the cabinet of the Moncada administration, and, perhaps the most appealing, the perception of his willingness to go along unquestioningly with his superiors. From the beginning, Sandino represented a threat to Somoza and the National Guard establishment; to the former because of Sandino's political appeal to the masses, to the latter because the retention of arms by the guerrillas of the North violated

the requirement for a monopoly of force. The elimination of Sandino was deemed necessary to remove these twin obstacles and to clear the path for Somoza's ascendancy to the presidency. With the US Marines removed (1933), Sandino eliminated (1934), and the National Guard fully under control (1935), Somoza ousted Sacasa and achieved the presidency in a pro forma election (1936) and was inaugurated in 1937. The roots of the Somoza dynasty were planted well and would thrive until 1979.

The purpose of this study is to concentrate on the background and emergence of the Sandinista movement and to examine in some detail the nature, characteristics, and execution of the guerrilla actions which eventually brought about the collapse of the Somoza regime.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND EMERGENCE, 1934-1974

The roots of the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* or FSLN) reach back for a half century to the assassination of General Augusto C. Sandino, leader of the Army to Defend National Sovereignty, allegedly by Nicaraguan National Guardsmen in 1934. From that year to the early post-World War II era, Sandino's supporters who comprised the old guard as well as new adherents carried out persistent but ineffectual actions, including armed forays, against the regime of Anastasio Somoza García (Tacho I). Following the murder of Tacho I in 1956, the Sandinistas continued their struggle against the dynastic successor, Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Tacho II), until 1979 when final victory was attained.

The precise date and circumstances of the FSLN emergence are somewhat vague and confusing. According to Tacho II, an organization known as the Nicaraguan Patriotic Youth had been formed in 1960 under the direction of the Cuban ambassador in Nicaragua prior to the severance of diplomatic relations with the Castro government. Allegedly, Carlos Fonseca Amador and other militants in this organization formed the nucleus of the FSLN. In 1963, the FSLN publicly disclosed its existence for the first time when the guerrillas in their initial action took over a radio station. It was estimated that approximately 50 FSLN members received training under Cuban auspices during the formative years. By 1966, the fruits of this training were revealed by the initiation of

guerrilla operations in the northeastern provinces of Matagalpa, Jinotega, and Zelaya.

According to the Cuban version, Carlos Fonseca was engaged in setting up the New Nicaragua Movement from 1961-1963. This effort involved the integration of earlier Sandinista combatants with militants who had gone underground in the country. During this period, Fonseca as a fugitive travelled to Cuba, Honduras, and Costa Rica. He was apprehended in Managua in June 1964 after returning to Nicaragua surreptitiously the previous year. After a six-month confinement in prison, Fonseca was exiled to Mexico but he secretly returned to Nicaragua in mid-1966. Three years later, the Costa Rican authorities discovered Fonseca within their jurisdiction and banished him to Cuba in 1970.

Other sources provide additional information about the birth of the FSLN and the triumvirate chiefly responsible for its existence. Carlos Fonseca was born in Matagalpa and studied law at the University of Managua. He joined the Nicaraguan Socialist Party in 1955 and visited the Soviet Union and East Germany (DRG) two years later. In the summer of 1959, Fonseca, suffering from bullet wounds received in a guerrilla action in northern Nicaragua, went to Havana where he recuperated at the home of a government official who served on the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Returning to his native country in 1960, Fonseca resigned from the Socialist Party and created the Patriotic Nicaraguan Youth Group.

The second founding member, Tomás Borge Martínez, also was born in Matagalpa and studied law at the university in León before joining a Marxist cell in 1954. Following the assassination of Tacho I in 1956,

he was imprisoned along with Fonseca and was thought to have died during confinement. In 1978, however, Borge appeared among the prisoners released by Somoza following the FSLN assault on the Nicaraguan National Palace. The final member of the triumvirate, Silvio Mayorga, accompanied Fonseca on his second trip to Cuba in 1960 where both received further revolutionary training and finalized plans for the establishment of the Castro-backed National Liberation Front (*Frente de Liberación Nacional* or FLN).

Upon departure from Cuba in 1961, Fonseca and Mayorga joined Borges in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where discussions were held on the nature and organization of the new anti-Somoza guerrilla group. Fonseca, dedicated to the Sandino legacy, was able to convince his colleagues that the name of the martyr should be memorialized by its incorporation into the title of the organization. Accordingly on 23 July 1961, the FSLN was born with its symbolic red and black revolutionary colors--the same as those of Castro's "26 of July Movement." Of the founding members, only Borge lived to witness the 1979 Sandinista victory. Mayorga was killed in the Pancasán campaign of 1967 and Fonseca lost his life during combat in the northern mountainous region of Jinica in 1976.

Having reached a common understanding on the organization of the FSLN, the triumvirate assembled approximately 60 recruits for guerrilla training at a base camp located in Honduras, not far from the Nicaraguan border, in rugged mountainous terrain between the Coco and Patuca Rivers in the Bocay region. A year and a half of training transpired at the base camp before the first combat operation was launched in 1963 against the Nicaraguan hamlets of Raití, Walakitan, and Zanzán--all in Jinotega

province. The first two villages were taken over by the guerrillas but a unit of the Nicaraguan National Guard confronted the Sandinistas at Zangán and put them to flight across the border. Several guerrillas were killed and others wounded, including Mayorga, before the retreat to their Honduran camp could be accomplished. Instead of a safe haven, most of the returning guerrillas discovered themselves under arrest by Honduran authorities and the subjects of deportation orders to Mexico. Fonseca was imprisoned in Tegucigalpa but Borge managed to elude his captors and, eventually, crossed the border clandestinely to his native land. After a short period of confinement, Fonseca likewise reentered Nicaragua secretly in 1963.

During the next four years, the Sandinista triumvirate expended its efforts toward a reexamination of past errors and the formulation of a new strategy designed to gain more popular support for the FSLN, both at home and abroad. Within Nicaragua, major emphasis was placed on building up a well-organized urban guerrilla network by strengthening the political base through alliances with leftist parties and agitating university faculty and student groups. Progress also was made in the rural areas by capitalizing on the plight of the peasants and fanning the flames of discontentment through propaganda campaigns. Armed confrontations with National Guard forces gave way to more subtle and longer-ranged preparatory measures. Outside Nicaragua, Fonseca was the Sandinista emissary for winning friends and influencing enemies as he toured such countries as Cuba, Mexico, and Honduras, returning secretly to his home base each time. Even though arrested in Managua during June 1964, Fonseca proved to be too much of a political liability for long-term

imprisonment; instead, he was declared *persona non grata* and deported to Mexico in 1965. A year later, Fonseca was back in Nicaragua to oversee the next phase of guerrilla operations which would test the new strategy as well as the concept of consolidation of forces developed between 1963 and 1967.

The launching pad for the first major guerrilla action was Pancasán, located in the Cordillera Dariense northeast of Matagalpa. An intensive nine-month campaign of indoctrination and mobilization had enabled the FSLN to gain political control over the inhabitants of this remote mountainous region. Military domination, however, remained to be proved. This opportunity presented itself in August 1967 when three guerrilla columns, each led by a member of the triumvirate, suffered a calamitous defeat at the hands of the National Guard. Twenty of the 35 guerrillas, including Mayorga and other top leaders, were killed in the face of overwhelming firepower by the government forces as well as by tactical errors committed by the Sandinistas. The failure of the Pancasán campaign also may be attributed to an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the FSLN to achieve identity of purpose with a majority of the peasants living in the area. Somoza did not miss the opportunity to capitalize on the National Guard victory by declaring the extinction of the Sandinista movement in a speech at Jinotega near the battle site. While admitting defeat in the battle, the guerrillas were unwilling to concede the loss of the war against Somoza. The FSLN maintained that 50 hard core members could be counted on for the continuing struggle.

From the fall of 1967 to almost the end of 1974, the FSLN was engaged in what a top Sandinista leader, Bayardo Arce Castaño, later recalled as

"the accumulation of forces in silence." This period was characterized by exhaustive introspection and unrestrained self-criticism in view of the unsuccessful Pancasán action. In the search for an elixir, the FSLN leadership carefully scrutinized the ideas and tactics of Sandino, as well as those espoused by world-wide revolutionary leaders. In addition to theoretical study, the Sandinistas were involved in carrying out projects aimed at the growth and development of a broader-based mass movement. More intensive efforts were focused on breaking down the barriers between the FSLN and the masses through the establishment of civic, social, and professional associations headed by individuals responsive to FSLN directions. These associations included workers, students, professionals, artistic groups, and neighborhood committees in the urban areas and peasant organizations in the countryside. Special emphasis was placed on winning the support of the labor movement through the backing of strikes and grievances and recruiting new members from the disenchanted youth and disgruntled university students. Financial support was derived from intermittent armed robberies and contributions from sympathetic individuals.

The Sandinist cause was bolstered by the corrupt practices and repressive actions of the Somoza regime. It was said that Somoza operated in accordance with the three "P's": *peso* (money) for his friends; *palo* (beating) for the backsliders; and *plomo* (lead) for his enemies. The massive earthquake of 23 December 1972 virtually leveled Managua and killed approximately 10,000 people, injured over 20,000, and left roughly 300,000 people homeless with overall damages estimated at \$1 billion. Somoza, self-appointed head of the national emergency commission, directed

recovery operations from his country estate, southwest of the capital, and disbursed the funds and materials received from outside sources. Approximately \$32 million in public funds and over \$100,000 in private contributions were sent within six months after the disaster by the United States. In addition, American food, medical supplies, and other materials were donated. Somoza's recovery efforts were directed more toward personal aggrandizement than the relief and rehabilitation of the destitute Nicaraguans. In the absence of a unified, articulate, opposition force, Somoza was able to take advantage of the calamity to enhance his own fortune. At the same time, he operated in an atmosphere of high visibility as foreign media representatives covered the aftermath of destruction and destitution in Managua. The image portrayed to the world was less than complimentary and provided additional ammunition for the Sandinistas in their effort to discredit and dethrone the Somoza dynasty.

Besides the national emergency which occurred at the most propitious time for the Sandinista cause, other events were taking place from 1967-1974 that portended an erosion of Somoza's power base. The Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua began to intensify its involvement in the social and humanitarian concerns of the populace. After Miguel Obando Bravo became archbishop in 1970, progress toward the implementation of the new liberation theology could be observed. The reorientation of the clergy from strong support for the government to increased concern for the governed created friction between the church and the state.

A major cause of peasant discontentment was the unequal land distribution. Approximately 200,000 peasants were without any land holdings and for the most part depended on work at the large estates for their

livelihood. The haciendas, some 1800 in number, occupied one-half of Nicaragua's cultivated soil while approximately 96,000 small farms existed on the remaining 50 percent. The Somoza family had over 8,000 square miles, including some of the most valuable sites, under their control. The peasant dilemma was well illustrated by a farmer's observation that a "Catch 22" situation existed in that refusal to give the guerrilla food or willingness to do so could result in death at the hands of either the guerrillas or government forces.

The preponderance of firepower evidenced by the National Guard in their counterinsurgency operations revealed the characteristics of a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it prevented the FSLN from establishing a secure rural stronghold and kept the guerrillas penned up in remote areas apart from their supporters in settled towns and villages. A guerrilla base camp had been set up in the mountainous region around Zinica, Matagalpa province, following the Pancasán campaign for the purpose of training raw recruits who for the most part came from urban areas. On the other hand, the heroic stand of the guerrillas in the face of overwhelming odds, such as the Pancasán operation, enhanced the prestige of the FSLN in the eyes of many inhabitants who supported the underdog and were powerless to defy Somoza openly. This support was exploited by the Sandinista leadership in order to expand and strengthen its political leverage. Somoza's forces also took their toll. Several top FSLN members were captured and imprisoned by government authorities. One of the most important guerrilla leaders, Daniel Ortega Saavedra, was arrested and sent to jail in 1967 where he remained for seven years--the entire period of "the accumulation of forces in silence" activity. Not until

late 1974 at the close of this period did the Sandinistas carry out a major operation against the Somoza regime.

CHAPTER II

CONSOLIDATION OF FORCES, DECEMBER 1974 - OCTOBER 1977

During 1974-1975, wide-ranging discussions among the FSLN leadership in regard to the tactics and form of struggle to be adopted led to the emergence of three discernible factions within the guerrilla movement. While Marxist-Leninist ideology remained the all-pervasive binding force, it became evident that this ideology had been modified and adapted to the Sandino experience with the goal of a socialist Nicaragua left intact. The first faction, known as the Prolonged Popular War Tendency (*tendencia guerra popular prolongada* or GPP), projected victory after a decades-long struggle in the rural areas, somewhat along the model of "Che" Guevara. Fonseca and Borge, as well as the original cadre of Marxists, were proponents of this tendency. In contrast to the GPP, the Proletarian Tendency (*tendencia proletaria* or TP) concentrated on preparing urban cadres primarily from poor sections of the barrios but also from labor organizations and universities. Jaime Wheelock was a leading advocate of the TP.

The Third Tendency (*tendencia terceristas* or TT), also called the Insurrectionists (*insurreccionales*), emerged from disagreements between the GPP and the TP in regard to the tactics, the timing of the uprising, the military effectiveness of the opposition, and the composition of the revolutionary forces. In regard to tactics, the TT favored direct and dramatic actions utilizing the elements of surprise and harassment but avoiding pitched battles and territorial conquests by the employment

of hit-and-run encounters. Emphasis was placed on acts of attrition designed to provoke a greater response on the part of government forces and thereby gaining a propaganda windfall. From the viewpoint of timing, the TT adherents championed a more immediate popular uprising than either the GRP or the TP and were opposed to an extended period of indoctrination and preparation of the masses for the eventual victory. Insofar as the military effectiveness of the opposition was concerned, the TT would not concede that the National Guard possessed such a high degree of unity of purpose or esprit de corps. On the contrary, it was anticipated that the spread of insurrection defections resulting from low morale would occur and blind loyalty to Somoza would succumb to individual self-interest and pluralistic considerations. Finally, and possibly the most significant, the TT welcomed non-Marxists from diverse socio-economic groups into its ranks, eventually resulting in 65% recruited from the lower stratum, 30% from the middle class, and 5% from the upper sector. The TT eventually emerged as the most dynamic and largest of the three factions.

International attention was captured by the FSLN on the night of 27 December 1974, following a daring raid on the private residence of a former government minister in Managua. A Christmas party was being held there in honor of the US Ambassador to Nicaragua. Fortuitously, the Ambassador had departed from the party hardly 30 minutes before the attack. Twelve guerrillas and their leader, Eduardo Contreras Escobar, seized as hostages more than two dozen highly influential Nicaraguan officials, foreign diplomats, and politically non-involved persons. Among the hostages were Somoza's brother-in-law, the Nicaraguan foreign

minister, the mayor of Managua, the Nicaraguan consul general in New York, and the manager of the Esso oil refinery in Nicaragua. A counter-attack by a police detachment was instigated but had to be called off in the interest of the hostages' safety. Soon thereafter, the Sandinistas made known their demands, including the acceptance of the mediatorial services of Archbishop Obando y Bravo. The demands were, as follows:

(1) the release of specified guerrillas, including Daniel Ortega, being held as prisoners by the Somoza government,

(2) a ransom of \$5 million in small denominations and varied serial numbers,

(3) an immediate increase in the basic wage scale and fringe benefits for workers,

(4) the suspension of repressive decrees and regulations which had been proclaimed by the Somoza government,

(5) the publication in the national press of Sandinista communiques without restrictions, and

(6) the abolition of censorship and the inauguration of freedom of information in the mass media.

The guerrillas specified a 36-hour deadline for compliance with their demands and threatened to kill the first hostage, followed by the execution of another every 12 hours if these demands were not met.

Somoza's reaction to the Christmas party raid was one of anger and disbelief. After a hastily summoned cabinet meeting, he decreed a state of siege and spread a dragnet over the larger cities. A number of suspected Sandinistas were rounded up, apprehended, and confined in an expeditious manner. At the hostage site, police units were reinforced by heavily armed National Guardsmen. As the 36-hour deadline came nearer, tensions from both sides built up rapidly. Relief came with word from the guerrillas that an extension of 12 hours had been granted

at the request of the mediator.

Within the extended time period, Somoza capitulated to all of the guerrilla demands except for the original ransom sum which was reduced to \$1 million. On 30 December, 14 former Sandinista prisoners and the 13 guerrilla commandos boarded a flight to Cuba, accompanied by Archbishop Obando y Bravo and other dignitaries serving as guarantors of safe passage out of Nicaragua. The release of the hostages at the airport and the dissemination of the FSLN communiques by the Nicaraguan media brought the crisis to its conclusion. The final casualty tally was four killed (the host, two policemen, and a chauffeur) and three wounded, including one of the Sandinistas.

The Christmas party raid provoked Somoza to launch a major counter-insurgency campaign during the 34-month period from January 1975 to October 1977. The FSLN found itself placed in a defensive posture as clandestine networks, urban cells, and rural guerrilla forces were discovered and dealt heavy blows by Somoza's agents and the National Guard. Much of the credit for the Guard's success may be attributed to the existence of a highly trained group, known as BECAT (*Brigada Especial Contra La Acción Terrorista* or the Special Brigade Against Terrorist Action) and the elite, 400-man "General Somoza García" combat battalion. Both of these special groups were formed within the 8,000-man National Guard organization. At this time, the Sandinista active fighting strength was estimated to be 100 (60 urban and 40 rural guerrillas), although the FSLN claimed to have twice that number. Another 200 guerrilla suspects were being held in Nicaraguan prisons. The aggregate of men and firepower was weighted heavily on the side of the government forces and served to accentuate

the internal differences among the three separate FSLN factions. In addition, the imposition of the state of siege by Somoza during the Christmas party raid, which was to remain in effect to September 1977, effectively stymied FSLN efforts to carry out major actions against the government. Furthermore, the Sandinista propaganda campaign was affected adversely by the government restraint against the public media prohibiting any references to guerrilla operations during the period of martial law.

The nature of FSLN actions in 1975, 1976, and the larger part of 1977, was both limited in extent and sporadic in frequency. Somoza's forces were relentless in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations in the rural areas of Nicaragua and these efforts resulted in the decimation of many FSLN commando units largely in, but not confined to the northern part of the country. To the south of Managua, for example, approximately 40 guerrillas seized the town of Río Blanco, situated in the hills about 65 miles east of Matagalpa, in late March 1975 but were driven out by National Guardsmen after a brief occupation resulting in sizeable casualties. North of Managua in the municipality of El Sauce, León province, Guard forces carried out an attack on a FSLN training site in early August 1975 and killed four guerrillas. Farther north near the Honduran border, Somoza's forces engaged Sandinistas at Ocotal, Nueva Segovia province, and rounded up suspected guerrillas in the towns of Chinandega and Jinotepe to the south in Carazo province.

From September 1975 to August 1976, Somoza's National Guard kept the Sandinistas subdued by depleting their ranks, raiding guerrilla cells, and filling the prisons with suspected FSLN members. As the pressure increased, the Sandinistas were compelled to regroup and retreat deeper into the

remote areas of the countryside. Despite these adversities, the FSLN continued to develop its urban guerrilla capabilities and, by the fall of 1976, perceived the time to be ripe for retaliation. In mid-September, guerrillas attacked the National Guard command post in the southern city of Masaya and carried out other actions in the northern urban areas of León and Estelí. Somoza reacted by dispatching Guard reinforcements to Masaya and declaring a state of emergency in Estelí and León provinces.

Less than two months later, the FSLN leadership structure suffered two major setbacks. On 8 November, Carlos Fonseca Amador, the top Sandinista strategist, and two fellow guerrillas were tracked down and killed by National Guardsmen in the Zinica region, Matagalpa province. Although Fonseca took advantage of the natural protection afforded by the desolate mountainous environment, this advantage was offset by the close proximity of the Guard's northern zone headquarters at Rio Blanco near the border of Matagalpa and Zelaya provinces. One day earlier, Eduardo Conterros Escobar, leader of the Christmas party raid, was shot dead along with two guerrilla companions in Managua by a BECAT patrol. Somoza seized upon this incident as proof of Castro's role in training the Christmas party raiders and secretly returning them to Nicaragua for further insurgency operations.

Following the death of Fonseca, the Sandinistas maintained a rather low profile for the next year. During the summer of 1977, the FSLN claimed the killing of 37 Guardsmen in more than a dozen ambushes in the northern Cordillera Isabela where the terrain favored guerrilla movements. On 19 September 1977, Somoza announced the termination of the state of siege imposed on the nation shortly after the celebrated

Christmas party raid. The primary motivation behind this decision apparently was pressure from the Carter administration when it threatened to withhold a \$2.5 million arms sale unless martial law was lifted and constitutional rights restored. Ten days after Somoza complied, the arms agreement received the green light in Washington.

In late July 1977, Somoza suffered a heart attack. He was incapacitated until his release from the hospital on 7 September. During this period, the Sandinistas lacked the strength and popular support to take advantage of Somoza's debilitation and move into the power vacuum. The inability of the FSLN to overcome its defensive posture led to observations both within and outside Nicaragua that the Sandinistas presented no serious threat to the Somoza regime.

CHAPTER III

FIRST OFFENSIVE, OCTOBER 1977-JULY 1978

Somoza's low threat perception of the FSLN changed after 13 October when the Tercerista faction launched a coordinated offensive against the National Guard at the northern town of Ocotal, some 20 miles from the Honduran border, and at San Carlos in the south, approximately five miles from Costa Rica. A few days later, the Sandinistas carried out hit-and-run attacks against the main Guard installation and other targets, including a Somoza-owned cement factory, in Managua. These actions represented the first in the capital by the FSLN and inaugurated urban guerrilla warfare as a complement to the traditional rural insurgency in the struggle against the Somoza regime.

The Sandinista guerrillas also attacked Guard barracks in Grenada and Masaya and ambushed a military convoy on the Managua-Masaya highway, killing five soldiers. Within a week, more than 20 Guardsmen and approximately 10 guerrillas had been killed in the confrontations. Despite the audacity of the operation, the FSLN objective of capturing Guard barracks at widely-separated locations was not achieved. For example, the 50-odd Sandinistas who seized the San Carlos barracks were dispersed within six hours and fled across the border into Costa Rica.

The FSLN offensive had international repercussions as well. On 14 October, National Guard aircraft in the process of eliminating the guerrillas involved in the San Carlos attack bombed and strafed three boats on the San Juan and Frio Rivers. These boats were carrying Costa

Rican officials who were on an inspection tour to insure that Sandinistas were not in the frontier area. The entry point at Los Chiles across the border from San Carlos was closed. Although no casualties occurred in the incident, Costa Rica filed a formal protest against Nicaragua in the OAS for the violation of its territory. Somoza countered by calling upon the OAS to condemn Costa Rica for permitting its territory to be used as a base of operations for FSLN actions against Nicaragua. Somoza also presented a complaint charging Cuba with providing material assistance to, and moral support for the Sandinista guerrillas.

The predominance of *Tercerista* influence on the FSLN was evident not only in combat initiatives but in the adoption of a revisionist political strategy as well. The failure of a minority of Marxist-Leninist purists who championed victory over Somoza through prolonged popular war opened the way for cooperation with bourgeois elements of Nicaraguan society. A group known as *Los Doce* (The Twelve) put aside their ideological differences and signed a public statement supporting the FSLN goal of popular insurrection and free elections. Consisting of leftist intellectuals, radical clergymen, conservative professionals and a wealthy businessman, *Los Doce* found themselves faced with an arrest warrant signed by Somoza. Rather than face arrest, they decided during the fall of 1977 to flee to Costa Rica. A few days after the FSLN October offensive, *Los Doce* issued a declaration in Costa Rica supporting the Sandinista cause and specifying that they must participate in any solution to the Nicaraguan problem.

The FSLN offensive also spurred on the formation in mid-October of a committee dedicated to the holding of a national dialogue for the

purpose of instituting major reforms in the country through non-violent means. Headed by Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, the committee brought together clerical, academic, professional and business representatives seeking to eliminate political corruption, enhance respect for human rights, and guarantee an honest presidential election in 1980. Unqualified backing came from the most outspoken political coalition, the Democratic Union of Liberation (*Union Democrática de Liberación* or UDEL) which had been organized by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Editor of *La Prensa*, the leading opposition newspaper in Nicaragua.

UDEL had been established just prior to the 1974 presidential election as an umbrella group embracing members of the Conservative, Social Christian and Socialist Parties. It also included representatives of labor unions opposed to Somoza. When first approached by the Obando committee, Somoza declined the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the group on the grounds that he would not enter discussions under pressure. By December, however, he had agreed to do so after the holding of municipal elections scheduled for 5 February 1978. The encouragement of the US Ambassador on this matter undoubtedly played a part in Somoza's change of heart.

The new year, 1978, hardly had begun when Somoza's major opponent, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, was gunned down in Managua on 10 January by three unknown assailants while enroute to his office. Chamorro, owner and editor of *La Prensa* which was renowned for its liberal, anti-Somoza views, had been a thorn in the sides of both Tacho I and Tacho II and had suffered arrest and imprisonment during their regimes. The assassination was decried throughout the Americas and public opinion pointed the finger

of accusation at Somoza. Somoza reacted by conducting an immediate investigation of the event and apprehended several suspects. The UDEL in deference to its founder announced the withdrawal of its support for the Obando committee's effort to initiate a national dialogue.

For two days following the death of Chamorro, riots broke out in Managua as looting, arson and destruction to property took a toll of \$7 million in damages. Compounding the situation was the beginning of a general strike called by business and labor leaders on 24 January. The strike was the first in Managua and later spread to approximately a dozen Nicaraguan cities and towns. The national strike, reported to be 50% effective in Managua and 80% in the outlying municipalities, was coordinated in the *La Prensa* offices by Chamorro's son who had become the new editor.

From the standpoint of the FSLN cause, the political ramifications following Chamorro's murder were both supportive and widespread. Having initiated their first coordinated offensive barely three months earlier, the Sandinistas now sought to capitalize on the public disorders occasioned by the Chamorro tragedy and fan the flames of anti-Somoza feelings. The government forces had begun a systematic effort to quell the riots and put a stop to the strike. Demonstrators had been fired upon by the National Guard and several were killed or wounded. The 12,000-man work force at the Managua oil refinery was kept from participating in the strike by a military takeover of the plant. Government censorship of the media was instituted as a means of preventing the dissemination of information on the general strike. The owners of commercial establishments on strike were apprehensive, recalling the business

strike some 20 years earlier when National Guardsmen compelled them to reopen.

FSLN guerrilla units were strategically located throughout the country. These units included the Carlos Fonseca Front in the north, the Pablo Ubeda Front in the northeast, the Rigoberto López Perez Front in the west, and the Benjamín Zeledon Front in the south. Estimates of Sandinista combat-trained personnel ranged from fewer than 200 upwards to 1,000 with the lesser figure deemed more probable. Northern Nicaragua represented the area of the country in which the FSLN felt most secure. Indians and peasants, as well as hacienda laborers in this area, increasingly became pro-Sandinista in sentiment and were recruited into the guerrilla ranks in substantial numbers. In Nueva Segovia province, far to the north on the Honduran border, control was virtually in the hands of the FSLN. In view of this control, the FSLN regional operations center was relocated to this area.

In an effort to capitalize on the public disorders resulting from the Chamorro incident, the FSLN initiated its first actions since the general strike began during late January. Once more, the Sandinistas proved their increased combat capability by hitting targets at widely separated locations in Nicaragua. In the northwest, guerrillas attacked a U.S.-owned bank in Chichigalpa and a military vehicle transporting Guardsmen near Chinandega. In León, it was reported that confrontations between Somoza's Guard and the FSLN over a two-day period culminated in 14 combatants killed and 24 injured. In the southwest, approximately 30 Sandinistas on 2 February attacked the National Guard post and occupied the barracks in Grenada for nearly two hours before being dispersed. On

the following day, a group of guerrillas moved out of Costa Rica and attacked the Nicaraguan frontier town of Peñas Blancas. After breaching the border checkpoint, they linked up with other FSLN combat units in the area. Some 60 to 100 guerrillas of the combined force then launched an attack against the National Guard barracks in Rivas, 50 miles south of Grenada, but were driven out by Somoza's troops following four hours of intensive combat. Three Guardsmen and eight guerrillas lost their lives in this engagement. In the far north, FSLN commandos made strikes against military personnel manning posts on the Honduran frontier while along the southeast border guerrillas carried out hit-and-run attacks against Nicaraguan soldiers.

Although the general strike and riots had for the most part subsided by mid-February, some anti-Somoza demonstrations continued to be held, primarily in the Indian districts of Masaya and León. On 21 February, National Guardsmen dispersed a crowd of participants in a religious service in the Nahoá Indian community of Monimbó on the outskirts of Masaya who were celebrating the 44th anniversary of Sandino's assassination. This action touched off several days of fighting and culminated in a five-hour battle between the Indians and the Guard. The revolt spread to the Indian residents of Subtiava, near León, and to those living in Diriamba and Jinotepe, Carazo province. While confrontations with the Guard in the latter two towns were sporadic in nature, Monimbó remained a hard core center of resistance, actively supported by the Sandinistas, despite the suppression of the initial uprising by Somoza's forces at a cost of approximately 80 lives.

On 26 February, the FSLN suffered a major loss with the death of a

prominent leader, Camilo Ortega Saavedra, the youngest brother of Daniel and Humberto. He had assisted the Indians in carrying out their rebellion in Monimbó and was killed by National Guard troops in the town of Catarina, Masaya province. Ten days later, the FSLN took revenge by murdering General Reynaldo Pérez Vega, the National Guard Chief of Staff, lured to the home of a female guerrilla, Nora Astorga de Jenkins, in accordance with plans drawn up by the Sandinista general directorate.

From March through July 1978, the FSLN succeeded in attaining greater strength and support and achieved a higher degree of combat unity. The outbreak of massive protests, demonstrations, and armed encounters against government forces provided the Sandinistas with numbers of cadres undreamed of only a year earlier. Guerrillas lost little time in seizing control of insurrectory conditions and filling the vacuum created by the absence of a trained, dedicated leadership. Financial requirements were met largely through armed robberies and private donations. From mid-March to late April, for example, Sandinistas robbed four banks, a mortgage company, and a businessman that netted the FSLN nearly \$150,000 and valuable jewelry of undetermined value. The FSLN coordinator of finances, Carlos Tunnermann Bernheim, identified four sources of the Sandinista war chest: citizen's solidarity committees in more than 60 cities in 25 countries, political parties, ransom and recuperation (i.e., bank robberies) actions, and wealthy donors. By the end of conflict, Tunnermann revealed that more than \$5 million had been contributed to the Sandinistas by the solidarity committees with the largest amounts coming from West Germany, Sweden, and Venezuela, followed by the United States, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Costa Rica provided food.

clothing, medicine, and transportation in lieu of cash. Ransom and recuperation actions in excess of \$5 million yielded the largest returns to the war chest.

The differences among the three factions of the FSLN also became less discernible. The GPP tendency while continuing its efforts in the rural areas increased its involvement with the urban population of northern Nicaragua. In addition, the GPP began to view the popular insurrection with more immediacy in contrast to its earlier decades-long projection. At the same time, the TP faction turned increasing attention toward the organization of rural workers while maintaining its primary concern with the urban proletariat. The TT faction began to see the fruits of its insurrectionist labors as more supporters from diverse elements of society came forward to champion revolution now rather than later. It should be noted, however, that the TT had yet to see the breakdown of combat effectiveness and esprit d'corps of the National Guard establishment come to pass as originally predicted. Finally, the Sandinistas took an important step toward increased unity among the different factions. At a secret convocation held in Costa Rica in July, an agreement was signed by representatives of the three FSLN tendencies providing for an overall coordinating committee. The agreement also provided for tactical cooperation but each faction retained its freedom to determine the tactics employed in its combat operations.

FSLN combat actions from March through July 1978 were quite limited in view of the National Guard's ability to maintain a high profile in strategic regions and thereby keeping the guerrillas in a defensive posture throughout the country. Clashes between the Sandinistas and

government forces occurred near the Honduran border post of El Espino, Madriz province, and at Esteli. The FSLN also launched attacks from Costa Rica against Guardsmen across the border in El Castillo, Rio San Juan province. The most spectacular action took place on 20 July when a pair of Sandinista guerrillas fired two rockets from the Intercontinental Hotel in the direction of the cement bunker headquarters of Somoza, approximately 150 feet away. One rocket failed to explode and the other impacted in the National Guard compound without causing casualties.

Another significant development in July was the return to Nicaragua of *Los Doce*, now reduced to ten members, from their Costa Rican refuge.

The *Los Doce* membership consisted of:

- (1) Sergio Ramirez Mercado, a writer and lawyer,
- (2) Joaquin Cuadra Chamorro, a corporation lawyer,
- (3) Emilio Baltodano Pallais, a wealthy coffee planter,
- (4) Dr. Carlos Tunnermann, former rector of the national university,
- (5) Ernesto Castillo, lawyer and professor,
- (6) Casimiro Sotelo, an architect,
- (7) Dr. Carlos Gutierrez, a dentist,
- (8) Ricardo Coronel Kautz, an engineer,
- (9) Father Fernando Cardenal, a priest, and
- (10) Father Miguel d'Escoto, a priest.

Although convicted in absentia, the Somoza government stayed the court order under pressure from the Carter administration and permitted their entry into Nicaragua. On 16 July, a rally in honor of *Los Doce* was held in the town of Esteli and soon thereafter they traveled to Monimbó to pay tribute to the staunch anti-Somoza, Indian rebels. *Los Doce* joined the Broad Opposition Front (*Frente Amplio Opositor* or FAO) which had been formed earlier in the year and had the distinction of being the first political coalition uniting the moderates and leftists opposed to

Somoza. The FAO included in its membership a diverse following embracing UDEL, the MDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Movement) and 16 moderate organizations, laborers, and student groups. The FAO was supportive of the *Tercerista* tendency of the FSLN. On 18 July, the FAO called for a 24-hour general strike but businesses refused to participate. This reinforced Somoza's feeling that time was on his side and that a dissident minority opposition was not capable of undermining his government.

CHAPTER IV

FAILURE OF MEDIATION, AUGUST-DECEMBER 1978

The apparent security of the Somoza government was challenged suddenly at noon on 22 August when Eden Pastora as "Commandante Cero" led 24 Sandinista guerrillas in a successful operation against the National Palace, site of the Nicaraguan Congress, in Managua. Preparations for the execution of the action had begun in May when Pastora was summoned from his exile in Costa Rica and directed to report to Managua. Pastora's lieutenants were designated as "Commandante Uno," Hugo Torres, and "Commandante Dos," Dora María Tellez Arguello who had taken part in the 1974 Christmas party raid. Between 5 and 12 August, a 25-member commando team composed of two squads was established in a "safe house" within the capital environs for a 10-day training and orientation session.

On 22 August, the commandos went into action. Dressed in Nicaraguan Army uniforms and transported to the National Palace in two simulated Army trucks, the guerrillas reached their destination at approximately 12:30 P.M. and, according to plans, filed into the entrances of the Palace. Except for one momentary challenge by a National Guardsman who was killed by "Commandante Cero," both guerrilla squads gained access to the legislative chamber on the second floor and captured 40-odd congressmen engaged in deliberations. Within minutes of the initial assault, control of the National Palace passed into the hands of the Sandinista guerrillas. National Guard forces employing tanks and aircraft were dispatched rapidly to the scene and sealed off the Palace grounds. On orders from Somoza, however, the troops withheld fire and a self-imposed truce went

into effect. At the same time, Somoza declared a state of siege and rushed Guardsmen into other major cities as a security precaution.

Initially, the Sandinistas took 1500-2000 hostages, including approximately 50 congressmen, cabinet members, journalists, office workers, and visitors. It was agreed that Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo of Managua, along with the Bishops of Granada and León, would act as mediators between the government and the insurgents. The guerrilla demands submitted to the bishops on 22 August were:

- (1) the issuance of a general amnesty to all Nicaraguan political prisoners,
- (2) the release of 100 specified Sandinista prisoners and provision of their transportation to Mexico, Panamá, and Venezuela,
- (3) the transmission of Sandinista communiques through the Nicaraguan mass media,
- (4) the establishment of a 1,000-foot neutral zone between the National Guard forces and the Palace grounds,
- (5) the acquiescence of the government to the demands of the striking hospital workers in Managua,
- (6) the payment to the Sandinistas of \$10 million ransom by the government in small denominations of currency,
- (7) the guarantee of safe conduct on the part of the government for the Palace guerrilla forces out of Nicaragua, and
- (8) the compliance with the above demands by the government within eight hours.

Somoza asked for, and received a 24-hour extension to the deadline and succeeded in obtaining the release of several hundred minor employees, women, and children from their Palace prison. The guerrillas also returned 15 injured persons and the bodies of eight National Guardsmen who were victims of the attack. In the meanwhile, 25 hostages managed to escape from the Palace through an open office window.

As negotiations continued between the National Palace and Somoza's Bunker, "Commandante Cero" informed the mediators that the deadline for meeting the Sandinista's demands was critical and failure to meet it would result in the execution of two Liberal Party congressmen and a journalist with Somoza's newspaper, *Novedades*. Only four hours before the expiration of the deadline, an agreement was reached on 23 August which contained some modifications of the original Sandinista demands--the most significant being the reduction of the ransom from \$10 million to \$500,000.

During the morning of 24 August, arrangements for the release of the remaining hostages and the conveyance of the Sandinista guerrillas out of Nicaragua were carried out in an orderly fashion. Two aircraft transported the 25-member commando force, headed by "Commandante Cero," and 59 recently released Sandinista prisoners, including Tomás Borges, to Panamá where they were granted asylum. Accompanying the guerrillas were the three Roman Catholic Bishops who served as mediators, the Panamanian Ambassador to Nicaragua, and the Venezuelan Commercial Attache in Managua. One week later, it was reported that 22 of the freed prisoners had been flown to Cuba in a Panamanian aircraft after Castro had agreed to receive them.

The National Palace crisis barely had ended when the FAO gave notice of a nationwide general strike to begin on 27 August. The announcement was sufficient to set off major disturbances in Matagalpa by *los muchachos* (young boys) some no older than 12 years, wielding small arms and setting up barricades in the streets. The combination of the general strike and the breakdown of law enforcement following a siege of the

local National Guard garrison resulted in a paralysis of the town. Somoza responded by sending in some 300 Guard reinforcements and conducting aerial attacks against insurgent positions. It was reported that approximately 50 persons had been killed and 200-odd wounded during a five-day period. Similar confrontations between *los muchachos* and government forces were reported in the towns of Diriamba, Estelí, Jinotepe, and León. Even Managua was not spared where a Guard installation was attacked by teenage fighters, estimated to be 5,000-strong and supported by approximately 400 Sandinista guerrillas.

Appalled at the enormity of Somoza's counterinsurgency effort and backed by the Carter administration, Venezuela appealed to the UN Security Council and the OAS for urgent actions to resolve the Nicaraguan crisis. In the meantime, Costa Rica requested the OAS to establish a peacekeeping mechanism to prevent the Nicaraguan conflict from spilling across its boundary. An earlier attempt on the part of Costa Rica to convene a meeting of the Central American heads of government to discuss measures for resolving the conflict had failed. Initially, Venezuela agreed to delay its OAS initiative in order to give priority for consideration of the Costa Rican proposal. After sustaining aerial bombardment and strafing by Nicaraguan aircraft inside its territory not far from the border town of Peñas Blancas, Costa Rica received the concurrence of the Venezuelan government, backed by the United States, to merge their requests for an OAS meeting to resolve the Nicaraguan crisis. In mid-September, the OAS agreed to dispatch a fact-finding mission for the purpose of investigating the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border incident.

On 9 September, the FSLN guerrillas in league with *los muchachos* launched a widespread coordinated offensive primarily centered on National Guard personnel and facilities in the cities of Chinandega, Estelí, Granada, León, and Masaya. Referring to the new offensive as the greatest threat to Nicaraguan national security in a half-century, Somoza initially decreed a state of emergency in Masaya and Estelí provinces but extended it to the remainder of the nation a few days later. Mobilization of 3,000 Nicaraguan military reservists also was ordered. A week after the offensive began, Sandinistas were able to maintain their ironclad hold on the northern cities by bottling up the National Guard garrisons. In the city of León, for example, Somoza found it necessary to send in a 300-man reinforcement with Sherman tanks, the first known deployment of these armaments, before the city could be recovered from the insurgents. By 19 September, the National Guard had restored government control over the beleaguered cities, both in the north and the south; however, intensive fighting continued nonetheless.

FSLN operations were conducted simultaneously in the far southern region against Peñas Blancas near the Costa Rican border. Relations between Nicaragua and Costa Rica steadily deteriorated as Sandinista guerrillas employed bases in Costa Rican territory as staging areas for attacks across the Nicaraguan border. As noted earlier, Nicaraguan aircraft in hot pursuit of FSLN guerrillas on 12-13 September had carried out raids on Costa Rican territory which became the basis of the request for OAS intervention. From the viewpoint of national security, Costa Rica felt especially vulnerable because, in contrast to other Latin

American republics, she had a 5,000-man civil guard force instead of a formal armed force. This vulnerability was alleviated to some extent by the conclusion of a mutual defense agreement with Venezuela on 15 September and, a few days later, the basing of four Venezuelan combat aircraft in her territory. In addition, Panamá loaned Costa Rica several helicopter gunships for defense purposes.

On 17 September, nearly 200 FSLN guerrillas moved out of Costa Rica and seized the Nicaraguan border town of Peñas Blancas. After a day-long fight in which the National Guardsmen successfully held their position, the guerrillas were compelled to flee to their Costa Rican sanctuary. The Costa Rican authorities apprehended and deported them to Panamá. An 18-mile border strip in the area was designated by Costa Rica as a military zone to deter further incursions by the Sandinista guerrillas. In the meantime, the OAS censured Nicaragua for its 12-13 September aerial attack on Costa Rican territory which resulted in injuries to several civilians.

Attempts on the part of the United States to establish machinery for the mediation of the Nicaraguan crisis were not made until the September offensive by the FSLN had been underway for a week. On 17 September, William Jorden, US Ambassador to Panamá and Carter's newly designated special envoy, began a tour of Colombia, Venezuela, Panamá, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico in an effort to gain multilateral support for a negotiated settlement of the crisis. Upon completion of the tour, Jorden met with Somoza on 25 September. One week later, Somoza agreed to a three-nation mediation panel whose membership included US Ambassador, William Bowdler (replacement for Jorden); Foreign Minister

Ramón Emilio Jiménez of The Dominican Republic; and former Foreign Minister Alfredo Obiols Gómez of Guatemala. The opposition counterpart in the mediation was a three-member commission of the FAO, consisting of Alfonso Robelo Callejas, founder of the MDN; Sergio Ramírez Mercado, representing *Los Doce*; and Rafael Cordova Rivas, head of UDEL. From the beginning, the FSLN opposed mediation inasmuch as it perceived such an effort as contrary to the Sandinista goal of complete military victory and elimination of the Somoza regime. Despite this opposition, the *Tercerista* faction maintained unofficial contact with the mediators through one of the FAO members, Sergio Ramírez Mercado of *Los Doce*. The FAO team was adamant in its refusal to negotiate directly with Somoza but was willing to hold discussions with other officials in the government.

From the arrival of the tri-national mediators on 6 October to the presentation of the FAO's first proposal on 25 October, the mediation sessions were characterized by a high degree of diversity, disunity, and suspicion on the part of the opposition; however, unanimity was evident on one issue, the requirement for Somoza's resignation. The FAO proposal called for a transition to an open presidential election by September 1981 with the immediate resignation and departure of Somoza from Nicaragua. In the event of his refusal to resign, the Congress was to remove Somoza from office on the grounds of incapability. A member of Congress would be chosen as acting president until a Council of State, composed of two members each from the FAO and the Liberal Party, could be formed. The Council of State would replace the acting president and select a three-member civilian junta which would govern the country until the 1981 election. The opposition proposal had the effect of driving Sergio

Ramírez Mercado out of the mediations who, along with the remaining members of *Los Doce*, fled to the Mexican Embassy on 25 October for asylum. On the following day, the proposal was presented to Somoza who lost no time in rejecting it.

The US position in the mediation effort called for a nationwide plebiscite in which the electorate would make the final decision on the future of Somoza and the Nicaraguan government. While Somoza had no desire to see his fate determined by the populace, he made a counter-proposal on 10 November for a national plebiscite which would select opposition members to serve with him and participate in the governmental processes. The FAO summarily rejected the counterproposal because it would permit Somoza to remain in power. Furthermore, the FAO gave notice of intent to leave the mediation discussions if Somoza had not resigned by 21 November.

The tri-national mediation commission requested that Somoza reconsider his refusal to resign and, at the same time, the United States began applying economic pressure. An International Monetary Fund credit of \$20 million for Nicaragua was postponed and the United States withheld economic and military assistance funds allocated to the Somoza government. Negotiations came to a standstill on 12 November as Ambassador Bowdler was called to Washington for consultations with the State Department. Six days later, the OAS human rights commission which had been in Nicaragua since 3 October investigating allegations of violations and abuses, issued its unfavorable report and recommended the imposition of sanctions against the Somoza regime.

Upon his return to Nicaragua, Bowdler and the mediation commission

made a diligent but unsuccessful effort to reach a compromised version of the plebiscite proposal before the 21 November deadline imposed by the FAO. The failure of the compromise effort led to the withdrawal of the FAO from the mediation discussions but did not stymie the attempts of the tri-national commission to resolve the crisis. The new proposal, known as "The Washington Plan," and offered to Somoza on 22 November, called for an internationally supervised plebiscite to be held within 60 days with the electorate making the choice as to whether or not the existing government would continue in power. In order to insure a free election, Somoza would be required to suspend martial law (in effect until 30 April 1979), permit the exercise of individual constitutional safeguards, grant amnesty to political prisoners, allow exiles to return to Nicaragua, eliminate all censorship restrictions, guarantee an open electoral process, authorize international control of the media, and keep the National Guard in the barracks. Somoza made short shift of "The Washington Plan" by rejecting it on 24 November. Three days later, the tri-national commission issued an ultimatum to Somoza in which he was given 72 hours either to accept the plan or suffer the withdrawal of the commission from the mediation effort. Just hours before the expiration of the deadline, Somoza asked for a short extension and announced his acceptance of the principle of a plebiscite.

From 1 December 1978 to 19 January 1979 when the tri-national mediation effort broke down, Somoza continued to reject conditions proposed by the opposition to insure a free and open plebiscite. Such conditions as the departure of Somoza and his family from Nicaragua, the replacement of the National Guard commander, and the neutral location of ballot

boxes did not square with Somoza's views. A breakthrough in the impasse appeared when representatives of the FAO, the Liberal Party, and the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister met together for the first time following Somoza's agreement to certain concessions which included the lifting of the state of siege, the granting of amnesty to political prisoners and *Los Doce*, and the modification of censorship policies toward the media.

A plebiscite was scheduled tentatively for 18 February 1979 but the conditions under which it would be conducted were never resolved. A last ditch effort by the tri-national mediation commission to reach agreement with Somoza by accepting his counterproposal for a plebiscite to be administered by a bipartisan national agency collapsed when he refused to accept a proviso giving the OAS final authority over the election process.

The end of the mediation effort witnessed a change in the US approach from "the carrot" to "the stick." On 8 February 1979, some 50 US officials assigned to military missions, the diplomatic corps, the Peace Corps and the Agency for International Development (AID) were recalled to Washington. These personnel represented approximately one-half of the total assigned to Nicaragua. Although diplomatic relations with the Somoza regime remained intact, the US military assistance program, already suspended, was terminated and economic assistance frozen at current levels.

The failure of the mediation effort removed the resolution of the Nicaraguan conflict from the conference table to the battlefield. The formation of an FSLN provisional junta to govern Nicaragua was announced on 22 September 1978 and the three members were identified as Sergio Ramírez Mercado, Rafael Cordova Rivas, and Alfonso Robelo Callejas.

Shortly thereafter, the Sandinista TP faction announced the beginning of a war of attrition against the Somoza regime by avoiding direct confrontations with the National Guard through the employment of hit-and-run tactics, designed to provoke overkill reactions from government forces. Up until this time, all of the major guerrilla actions had been carried out by the *Terceristas*, led by Daniel and Roberto Ortega and Victor Manuel Tirado. Military support for the Sandinistas also was funneling in from abroad. For example, the Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade which was composed of approximately 1200 volunteers who were trained in Panamá and led by influential Panamanians departed for Nicaragua on 27 September. The Brigade eventually was joined with the Sandinista guerrillas operating on the central front.

The FSLN designated Eden Pastora as commander of the Sandinista forces. Under his command was the Carlos Fonseca northern front, the Rigoberto López Pérez western front, and the Camilo Ortega central front. It was estimated that the FSLN may have had as many as 2,000 guerrillas under arms. At least, Somoza deemed the insurgency threat sufficiently serious to announce a projected increase in the National Guard strength from 7,500 to 15,000, requiring a doubling of the Nicaraguan defense budget.

On 15 October, FSLN guerrillas carried out attacks against National Guardsmen in Monimbó and Santa Rosa near Masaya, destroying three Guard trucks and killing several soldiers. Three days later, four Sandinistas robbed a US subsidiary branch bank in Managua of \$100,000, and on 27 October held up an armored car belonging to the same bank, seizing nearly \$150,000 in checks and securities. National Guardsmen succeeded

On 18 June, Panamá severed diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and, along with the new nation of Grenada, became the first countries to extend recognition to the Sandinista provisional junta.

Secretary of State Vance requested a meeting of foreign ministers of the OAS to take immediate action on the Nicaraguan conflict. Secretary Vance proposed that the OAS take the following actions: the replacement of Somoza by a transitional government of national reconciliation; the establishment of a cease-fire; the dispatch of an Inter-American peace-keeping force to Nicaragua, if required; a halt to arms shipments; and the instigation of a major relief and reconstruction program. The OAS resolution which was passed on 23 June differed from that proposed by Vance.

The OAS called for the immediate replacement of the Somoza regime by a government which included opposition groups and reflected the will of the people. In addition, it called for the holding of free elections, the guarantee of respect for human rights, and the provision of humanitarian assistance by OAS members in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Nicaragua. [On 12 July, the Sandinista junta notified the OAS that upon assuming power, it would honor these provisions in the conduct of the government.] On 22 June, the US State Department accused Cuba of providing military training and supplying arms to Sandinista guerrillas, shipped by way of Panamá and Costa Rica. This represented the most specific charge against Cuban involvement in the Nicaraguan war officially issued by the US government since the conflict began.

In late June, the Carter administration made a last ditch effort to get Somoza's approval of a plan which would bring about a peaceful transition of government. According to this four-part plan, Somoza would resign

officer captured as he crossed the border to identify the Costa Ricans under detention. According to the Nicaraguans, Costa Rica instigated the attack on the border station and wounded a National Guardsman. On the day following the incident, Costa Rica severed diplomatic relations with Nicaragua, closed the Peñas Blancas border crossing, and made an appeal to the OAS for civilian observers to be assigned to the border area for peacekeeping purposes.

On 30 December, the OAS passed a resolution condemning Nicaragua for armed aggression against Costa Rica and authorized the dispatch of civilian observers to the border area. In the meantime, Costa Rica mobilized some 600 Civil Guards to bolster the estimated 400-man force already stationed in the area. Despite these precautions, however, Sandinista guerrillas carried out hit-and-run assaults against the National Guard post at Río Sabalo and returned to Costa Rica.

On 26 November, FSLN guerrillas attacked a National Guard station in the village of Achuapa, León province, after crossing the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. Afterwards, the guerrillas fled back to their camp in Honduras and returned to Achuapa for more than a week of skirmishes with the Guardsmen. The National Guard found it necessary to use aircraft to support troops surrounding the guerrillas in the area. On 12 December, Somoza's Guard conducted air strikes against Sandinista bases in the Guaylo Valley, 175 miles north of the capital. Three days later in the south, FSLN guerrillas attacked the National Guard post near La Pimenta, not far from the Costa Rican border. On 26 December, approximately 30 Sandinista guerrillas took over an Indian community only 15 miles from Managua, killed two alleged informers and wounded

two others. They also held an anti-Somoza rally. At the same time, another guerrilla squad seized a radio station in Matagalpa, 100 miles north of the capital, and broadcast propaganda messages. Earlier, on 18 December, FSLN guerrillas clashed with National Guardsmen in the city of León. On 31 December, Sandinista guerrillas engaged National Guard troops after the latter discovered a guerrilla training camp in Estelí province.

By the close of 1978, Somoza still remained confident that the National Guard would defeat the Sandinistas and that peace and reconciliation were possible in 1979.

CHAPTER V

FINAL PHASE, JANUARY - JULY 1979

The new year, 1979, witnessed a continued escalation in the guerrilla campaign against the Somoza regime. During the first ten days of January, FSLN guerrillas carried out attacks against Guard forces in a dozen villages located in northern Estelí and León provinces. The Guardsmen responded with daily rocket and machine gun fire, causing a large number of civilian casualties. In Managua, the Sandinista guerrillas dynamited a radio station belonging to the Somoza family. The FSLN also clashed with National Guardsmen in Chinandega and León, destroying government property and conducting propaganda rallies.

Demonstrations and a one day general strike took place on 10 January to commemorate the first anniversary of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro's assassination. What had been billed as a peaceful demonstration became otherwise when approximately 2,000 participants shouting and waving Sandinista flags were fired on by National Guard troops near the National Stadium in the capital. On the previous day, a labor leader who also belonged to the FAO was killed in Managua while passing out flyers inviting people to join the march. While the FAO organized and called for the demonstrations, a new opposition group, called the United People's Movement (*Movimiento Pueblo Unido* or MPU) appeared to have the largest representation. Headed by the son of the slain Chamorro, the MPU contained some 19 student groups, labor organizations, and large numbers of urban poor, and was the backbone of the larger opposition entity known as the National Patriotic Front (*Frente Patriótico Nacional* or FPN). In addition to the allegiance of the

MPU, the FPN gained the adherence of *Los Doce* as well as nearly 50 other groups angered by the discredited mediation effort, and emerged as the most powerful umbrella organization in the opposition ranks. In contrast to the moderate position taken by the FAO, the FPN was oriented decidedly to the left and highly supportive of the FSLN. The predominate weakness of the opposition was the absence of a strong charismatic leader who could speak for all the dissident factions.

As the 21 February date for the celebration of the 45th anniversary of Sandino's martyrization approached, FSLN actions were increased both in frequency and magnitude throughout the country. On almost a daily basis, guerrillas attacked National Guard troops and facilities, robbed banks, confiscated medical supplies from hospitals, took over radio stations for propaganda broadcasts, damaged business and agricultural properties, and slaughtered pro-Somoza supporters. Fighting between the FSLN guerrillas and the Guard was especially heavy in Matagalpa, León, Granada, Masaya, Diriamba, Chichigalpa, Estelí, Chinandega, Managua, and along the Costa Rican border during the remainder of February and throughout March. More than 100 guerrillas attacked and occupied the towns of El Sauce, León province, and El Jícaro, Nueva Segovia province, with the latter remaining under FSLN control for 10 days.

A major step in the direction of FSLN consolidation occurred on 7 March when the three factions (the GPP, the TP, and the *Terceristas*) signed a unity pact which provided for the establishment of a 9-member national directorate (three chiefs from each faction) to oversee and coordinate their activities. The different factions, however, continued to operate as separate entities. In mid-March, the FSLN directorate

evolved a strategy aimed at undermining the Nicaraguan economy by striking at key export items. In pursuance of this strategy, the Sandinista guerrillas destroyed some 6,000 bales of cotton and processing facilities, as well as instigating attacks against cotton farmers and their properties in León and Chinandega provinces. The significance of these actions was not lost on the Somoza regime inasmuch as approximately one-third of Nicaragua's foreign exchange was derived from cotton exports. Furthermore, Nicaragua had begun defaulting on its foreign loans in November 1978 and Somoza had been seeking additional loans from abroad, in addition to stand-by credits from the International Monetary Fund. The US cancellation of a proposed \$10.5 million economic aid package for Nicaragua following the rejection of the tri-national mediation commission was a major setback for Somoza. The gravity of the economic situation forced the Nicaraguan government to institute the first currency devaluation in more than 20 years.

While experiencing the gruesome effects of economic deterioration in the country, Somoza was compelled at the same time to continue waging a costly, all-out military effort in order to counter the increasing guerrilla attacks against urban and rural centers throughout the nation. On 8 April, FSLN guerrillas moved into the town of Estelí and engaged National Guard troops in one of the fiercest battles since the September offensive. Fighting also broke out in the nearby towns of Condega and Ducualí where the guerrillas succeeded in shooting down a Guard C-47 transport and a Cessna rocket-firing aircraft. At the same time, Sandinista guerrillas engaged National Guardsmen on the western outskirts of Managua and in the city of León, including the outlying towns of El Sauce and

Achuapa. The most serious confrontations occurred in Estelí where more than 400 FSLN guerrillas seized the town and held it with the assistance of *los muchachos* for almost a week. The arrival of Guard forces employing aircraft, tanks, and heavy ground reinforcements put the guerrillas to flight into the nearby mountains.

As fighting continued in the north, FSLN guerrillas engaged Somoza's forces in the southern frontier near Costa Rica during mid-April. Skirmishes took place in the municipality of Rivas and the surrounding towns of Cárdenas, Colon, Oroquí, and Sapoá. Roadblocks also were erected by the guerrillas in more than a dozen sites in the Managua area. A heavy attack was carried out by the Sandinista guerrillas against the town of Catarina, Masaya province, some 20 miles south of the capital city. These actions served to keep the National Guard off balance and to relieve pressure on FSLN guerrillas engaged in the battle for Estelí to the north. By the end of April, however, National Guard forces had regained control of the city of León where aircraft and tanks again were brought in to overcome guerrilla resistance.

On 3 May, Sandinista guerrillas attacked a Guard post in the town of La Concepción, Masaya province, only 20 miles east of Managua, but fled after losing three of their men. A week later, a larger guerrilla force carried out a raid on a Guard barracks in the town of Santa Teresa, Carazo province, 30 miles south of Managua, and left four Guardsmen as casualties. From 4-10 May, the National Guard was engaged in a major operation against approximately 150 Sandinista guerrillas in the Cerro La Guinea area, Río San Juan province, near the Atlantic coast. Guard troops, supported by aircraft and helicopter gunboats, killed nearly one-third of the guerrilla

force and dispersed the remainder. This action made it one of the most serious defeats sustained by the FSLN. By mid-May, fighting between Guard and guerrilla units was occurring along the Río Guasaule on the Honduran border and the villages of Wiwilí (Nueva Segovia province), Ciudad Rama (Zelaya province), Juigalpa (Chontales province), and Morrito (Río San Juan province). On 20 May, several hundred FSLN guerrillas occupied the town of Jinotega and cut off all communications to the outside. After two days of intensive ground and air combat, the Guard regained control of the town and pursued the guerrillas into the surrounding rugged terrain.

Confrontations between the National Guard and the FSLN guerrillas continued to increase. On 27 May, during the celebration of the 52nd anniversary of the founding of the National Guard, FSLN guerrillas carried out heavy attacks against Managua, León and Jinotega. Mexico announced on 20 May the severance of diplomatic relations with the Somoza government. Although Costa Rica had broken relations with Nicaragua earlier, the governments of Colombia, Panamá, and Venezuela, as well as the United States, declined to follow Mexico's action in the interests of providing asylum for anti-Somoza refugees in their embassies and maintaining some influence on the crisis by their presence within the country.

The long-awaited final offense by the FSLN guerrillas began on 29 May and ended seven weeks later on 19 July with the Sandinistas taking over control of the Nicaraguan government. Tomás Borge and Humberto Ortega officially announced the beginning of the final offense and called for full mobilization of the Sandinista forces for the liberation of the country. On the morning of 29 May, 300 guerrillas, formed in five columns of 60 each, crossed into Nicaragua from Costa Rica and seized Hacienda El

Naranjo, not far from the village of El Ostional, Rivas province, and only four miles from the border. Somoza responded by moving large contingents of the National Guard to El Ostional and requesting the OAS to invoke the Rio Treaty against Costa Rica for its complicity in the invasion. Clashes between FSLN guerrillas and Guardsmen also occurred at other villages in Rivas province, such as Peñas Blancas and Las Mancuernas. Skirmishes likewise took place in Mollejones (Granada province) and La Pimienta and Morrillo (Río San Juan province). To the northeast, fighting was in progress in Zelaya province at Puerto Cabeza, Wasparam, Bonanza, Rosita, and Siuna.

On 4 June, the OAS rejected Somoza's appeal for action against Costa Rica. On the same date, Nicaraguan businessmen in compliance with an appeal by Sandinista leader, Humberto Ortega, began a general strike. As businesses closed their doors to the public, heavy fighting continued to spread as FSLN guerrillas took over control of Chinandega and confined the Guard troops to their garrison. Also, in the north near the Honduran border, Sandinistas carried out attacks against Guardsmen in Mozonte (Nueva Segovia province) and El Cacao (Matagalpa province). The guerrillas succeeded in bottling up some 200 National Guardsmen in their garrison during the fighting in Matagalpa. In León, the FSLN guerrillas were able to seize most of the city, including the airport, and pin down the National Guard garrison with the assistance of *los muchachos* and a newly formed militia. On 6 June, Somoza decreed a 90-day state of siege in an attempt to regain the initiative from the Sandinistas. In addition, Somoza continued to call up reservists and induct new recruits in the National Guard as the strength increased to 13,000 with approximately

one-third combat ready. The FSLN at this time was estimated to have roughly 5,000 under arms.

From 7-10 June, Sandinista guerrillas engaged National Guardsmen at various locations in the northern provinces of Nueva Segovia, Estelí, Madriz, and Jinotega, as well as in the southern provinces of Rivas, Carazo, Masaya, and Granada. From Ocotal near the Honduran border to Los Mojones on the Costa Rican frontier, the Guard was engaged in skirmishes of varying intensity with the FSLN guerrillas. The Sandinistas claimed control of more than two dozen cities, towns, and villages even though they had failed as yet to capture a single National Guard installation in any major city. On 9 June, FSLN guerrillas took over control of several Managuan suburbs in the face of aerial attacks by Guard light aircraft. On the following day, the Sandinistas fought Guardsmen in the western sector of the capital city and temporarily besieged a Guard garrison. This represented the first time that a major concerted attack against the National Guard had been launched by the guerrillas. Furthermore, the Sandinistas succeeded in blocking the major route to the Mercedes International Airport, south of Managua, and were engaged in heavy fighting not more than a mile from Somoza's stronghold in the Bunker. It should be pointed out that the guerrilla effort received substantial support from *los muchachos*.

The dramatic successes of the Sandinistas in only two weeks of fighting touched off new efforts by the Carter administration to end the debacle. The State Department sent Ambassador William Bowdler to Costa Rica and the Andean Pact countries on 9/10 June to seek their participation with the United States in bringing an end to the Nicaraguan crisis. On

12/13 June, over 200 US Embassy dependents were evacuated from Managua on orders from the State Department. Other foreign embassies soon followed suit.

The battle for León continued for three weeks with Guard aircraft strafing and bombing the city to relieve the besieged military post. On 16 June, the guerrillas captured the local National Guard headquarters, forcing the troops to withdraw but reinforcements enabled the Guard to regain the post a few days later. Chinandega and Estelí also were recaptured by Guard forces after heavy fighting. The Sandinistas gained control of eastern Managua in the face of determined resistance by Guard forces. While the conflict continued to become more intensified in the north, some 300 FSLN guerrillas crossed the Costa Rican border into Nicaragua on 14/15 June where a pitched battle with the Guard took place in Peñas Blancas. The Guard headquarters at Sapoá, only four miles across the border, was captured by the guerrillas. The invasion force seemed to be headed for the town of Rivas to join other guerrillas, engaged in skirmishes with Guard troops.

On 17 June, the FSLN announced the membership of its provisional junta: Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of the assassinated editor of *La Prensa*; Sergio Ramírez Mercado of *Los Doce*; Alfonso Robelo Callejas, a businessman; Moises Hassan Morales, a university professor; and Daniel Ortega Saavedra of the *Terceristas*. On the same date, Ecuador broke diplomatic relations with the Somoza government. The Andean Pact nations declared a state of belligerency in Nicaragua which placed the Sandinistas on an equal status with the Somoza regime in the contest for power--an action which the US State Department found highly displeasing.

On 18 June, Panamá severed diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and, along with the new nation of Grenada, became the first countries to extend recognition to the Sandinista provisional junta.

Secretary of State Vance requested a meeting of foreign ministers of the OAS to take immediate action on the Nicaraguan conflict. Secretary Vance proposed that the OAS take the following actions: the replacement of Somoza by a transitional government of national reconciliation; the establishment of a cease-fire; the dispatch of an Inter-American peace-keeping force to Nicaragua, if required; a halt to arms shipments; and the instigation of a major relief and reconstruction program. The OAS resolution which was passed on 23 June differed from that proposed by Vance. The OAS called for the immediate replacement of the Somoza regime by a government which included opposition groups and reflected the will of the people. In addition, it called for the holding of free elections, the guarantee of respect for human rights, and the provision of humanitarian assistance by OAS members in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Nicaragua. [On 12 July, the Sandinista junta notified the OAS that upon assuming power, it would honor these provisions in the conduct of the government.] On 22 June, the US State Department accused Cuba of providing military training and supplying arms to Sandinista guerrillas, shipped by way of Panamá and Costa Rica. This represented the most specific charge against Cuban involvement in the Nicaraguan war officially issued by the US government since the conflict began.

In late June, the Carter administration made a last ditch effort to get Somoza's approval of a plan which would bring about a peaceful transition of government. According to this four-part plan, Somoza would resign

and depart from Nicaragua, leaving the government in the hands of a constitutional successor. A junta of well-qualified individuals not connected with Somoza would be appointed by the successor. Following the appointments, the successor would resign and governmental powers would devolve upon the junta. The junta would then seek a cease-fire, work toward the creation of a broadly-based interim government, and prepare the nation for free elections to choose a constitutional president.

On 27 June, the new US Ambassador to Nicaragua, Lawrence Pezzullo, arrived in Managua and conferred with Somoza on the four-part plan. As in previous mediation efforts, Somoza attempted to gain concessions. He indicated his willingness to resign if his Liberal Party and the National Guard retained their same roles in the transitional government--a totally unacceptable alternative from the viewpoint of the opposition. By mid-July, Ambassador Pezzullo had failed after several meetings to gain Somoza's approval of the plan.

While the talks between Pezzullo and Somoza were being conducted, Ambassador Bowdler held a secret meeting on 28 June with the Sandinista provisional junta in Panamá--the first face-to-face encounter between a high level US official and Sandinista leaders. Earlier it was reported that a FSLN representative had met in Washington on 23/24 June with the Assistant Secretary for Latin America and the new Ambassador to Nicaragua. On 29 June, Bowdler continued discussions with the Sandinista junta in Costa Rica. The US Ambassador to Panama, Ambler H. Moss, joined Bowdler and Pezzullo in early July in an effort to achieve a peaceful settlement of the crisis. One of the major items on the agenda was the US proposal for the Sandinistas to install more politically moderate members

on an expanded junta. This proposal was rejected on 8 July by the FSLN leadership.

On 12 July, the Sandinista junta after meeting with Bowdler and representatives of Costa Rica, Panamá, and Venezuela, presented a peace plan which provided for the resignation of Somoza, the transfer of governmental powers to the Sandinistas, the dissolution of Congress, the institution of a cease-fire order, and the guarantee of personal safety both for National Guardsmen and for civilian supporters of Somoza who were not involved in grave crimes. The Sandinistas also proposed: the formation of a 30-member council of state with representatives from professional, university, and clerical organizations; the creation of a new military force to replace the National Guard; and the establishment of a pluralistic economy, combining state-owned, cooperative, and private enterprises. By 15 July, the junta agreed to two measures which finally secured US backing for the Sandinista regime: the appointment of an 18-member cabinet in which the moderates constituted a majority, and a promise to invite the OAS to monitor the human rights performance of the new government.

While discussions were in progress between Bowdler and the Sandinista junta, Somoza's Guard launched a major counter-offensive on 22 June along the southern front at three points: the Pacific coast, the shores of Lake Nicaragua, and in the south-central highlands where the Sandinista command post under Eden Pastora was located. On the following day, the FSLN guerrillas seized the municipalities of Diramba, after a three-day fight, and Masaya, following almost a month-long struggle. The Sandinistas established a logistical center and staging area along the Costa Rican-

Nicaraguan frontier, consisting of a corridor 15 miles in length and some two to five miles in width centered on the border post of Peñas Blancas. This so-called "liberated territory" extended from Salinas Bay on the Pacific Ocean to the town of Cardenas on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. One sector of the corridor extended 10 miles northward, approximately halfway to Rivas, to the village of La Virgen.

The battle for Managua which had been raging for nearly two weeks was progressing in Somoza's favor by 23 June at a high cost of manpower. Over 1,000 Guardsmen were involved in mopping-up operations. Guard aircraft continued to carry out raids on the guerrilla-dominated eastern sector of the capital. On 28 June, the Sandinista guerrillas were compelled to make a "strategic retreat" from Managua to their southern stronghold of Masaya in the face of heavy attacks by the National Guard. In the meanwhile, the Sandinistas had seized the town of Jinotepe, southeast of Diriamba, as well as the northern towns of Somotillo, Chichigalpa, and Guasaule near the Honduran border. The first clashes between the FSLN guerrillas and the National Guard in Granada since the beginning of the offensive were reported on 28 June as the guerrillas moved out of the Masaya area to that city. The Sandinista strategy involved the movement of guerrilla forces through Granada and along the highway to the town of Nandaime, north of Rivas, in an effort to outflank Guard forces concentrated south of Rivas. On 1 July, the guerrillas succeeded in forcing 600 National Guardsmen into their garrison in Rivas as fighting persisted within 150 feet of the installation.

In the meantime, the FSLN guerrillas regrouped in Masaya awaiting

the arrival of Sandinistas from the south to join them in the final onslaught against the capital. On 3 July, Guard forces carried out a major counterattack against Masaya and continued heavy fighting in Rivas and La Virgen further south. More than 20 towns and cities had come under Sandinista control by this time, including most of those in northern Nicaragua, the three border posts on the Honduran frontier, and the strategically located town of Sébaco, Matagalpa province. On 7 July, the Sandinista guerrillas captured the National Guard garrison in León, removing the last resistance to guerrilla control of that city.

By 11 July, Sandinista guerrillas from the north and south had moved within 15 miles of Managua and fighting was in progress at the outlying villages of Tipitapa and Sabana Grande. FSLN guerrillas controlled the villages of Tola, Nancimi, Belén, and Potosí in the northern province of Rivas and in the south in an area extending in the direction of the Pacific Ocean, the villages of Ostayo, Soticaballo, Sapoá, and Peñas Blancas. On 12 July, Sandinista guerrillas took over the town of El Sauce in northern León province and ambushed a Guard convoy at La Paz Centro on the Managua-León route. On the following day, it was reported that advanced elements of the FSLN guerrillas had returned to Managua and fought the Guard in the eastern and western areas of the capital. National Guard actions against guerrillas in various parts of Nicaragua continued as aerial bombing and strafing missions were carried out in a half-dozen towns and cities, including Estelí, León, and Matagalpa, with intensive ground combat at La Paz Centro. On 16 July, the Sandinista guerrillas finally destroyed the National Guard garrison in Estelí which had been under siege for two weeks. The guerrillas also began a concerted attack

against Chinandega, the last town held by Somoza's forces in the north.

With the Sandinista guerrillas now poised for the final battle of Managua, Somoza agreed at last to leave office and go into exile. His resignation and departure to the United States occurred on 17 July. After acceptance of Somoza's resignation, the Nicaraguan Congress named Francisco Urcuyo Maleaños, President of the Chamber of Deputies, as the new head of state. President Urcuyo stunned US officials and opposition leaders by declaring that he intended to complete the remainder of Somoza's term of office. The US Ambassador and key members of the US Embassy immediately departed from Nicaragua in protest over Urcuyo's declaration. Less than 24 hours later, on 18 July, Urcuyo resigned and turned over his powers to the Sandinista provisional junta. The junta had temporarily established itself in León on that date. The newly appointed commander of the National Guard, General Federico Mejía González, established contact with the junta for the purpose of completing details involved in the change of government. The Sandinistas were adamant in their refusal to reach any settlement until the National Guard agreed to an unconditional surrender.

On 17/18 July, Guard garrisons in Grenada, in the northern towns of Somoto, Ocotal, and Nagarote, and in the east-central town of Boaco capitulated to the FSLN. During the same period, Sandinista guerrillas ambushed a Guard convoy enroute to León, resulting in the deaths of 20 soldiers. Orders to continue fighting and not surrender were broadcast to Guard commanders from the Bunker compound throughout 18 July. In reality, the Guard by this time had ceased to be a combat force. During the early hours of 19 July, General Mejía and other staff members fled from the country, leaving the Guard organization in disarray. Sandinistas guerrillas

occupied the deserted Bunker a few hours later.

The formality of the Guard's surrender on 19 July was left to a junta-appointed provisional commander, Colonel Fulgencio Largaespada, who was selected from the guard ranks for that specific performance. The arrival of the Sandinista junta in Managua from León on 20 July signaled the successful conclusion of the seven-week final offensive. Four days later, the United States extended formal recognition to the new government. A month later, the junta officially decreed the establishment of the Sandinista People's Army with Humberto Ortega Saavedra designated as commander. The Army headquarters was located in Somoza's Bunker, renamed *Chipote* in commemoration of Sandino's guerrilla operations center in the remote mountainous region of Nicaragua. After 45 years, the assassination of Sandino had been avenged.

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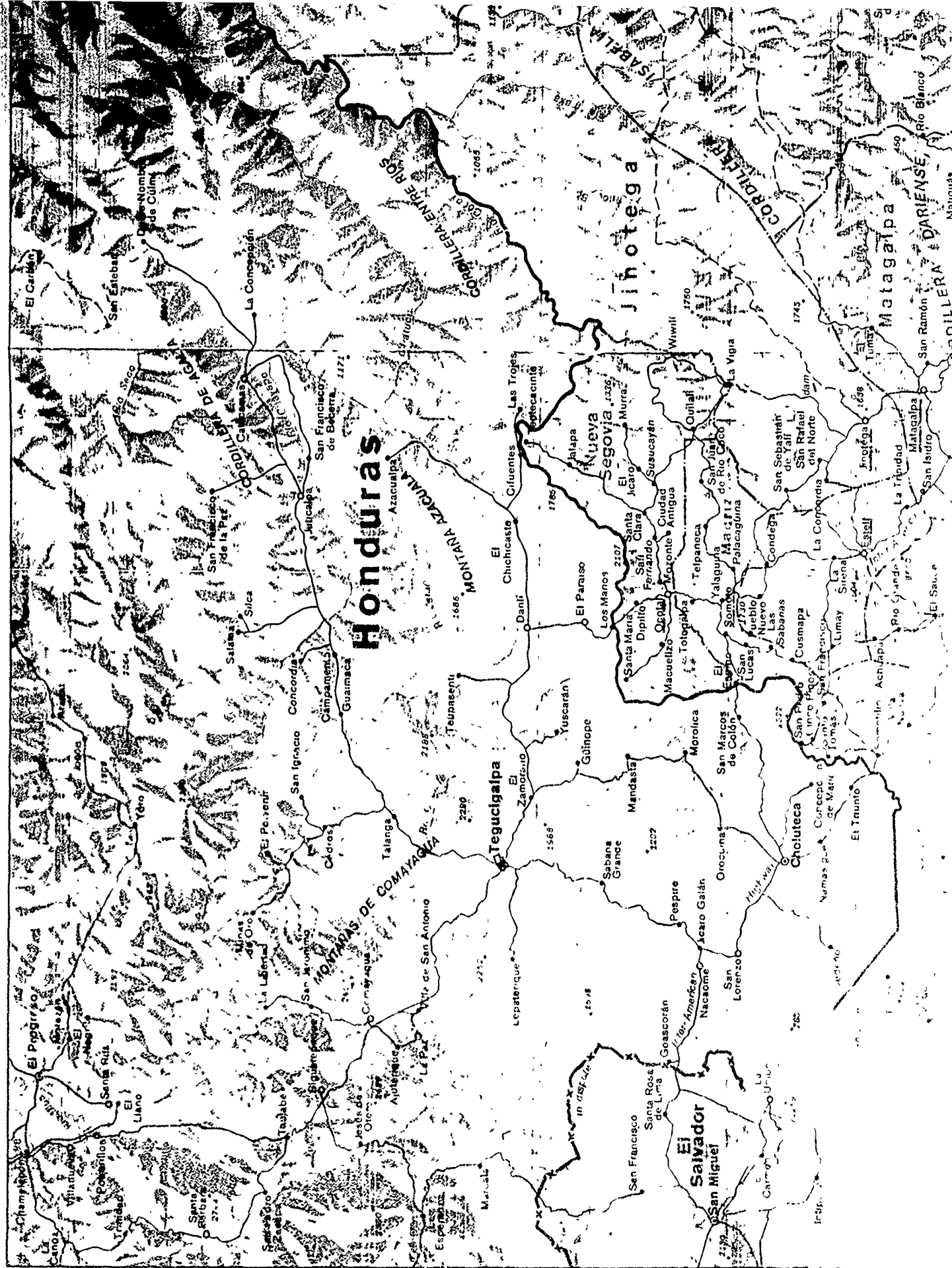
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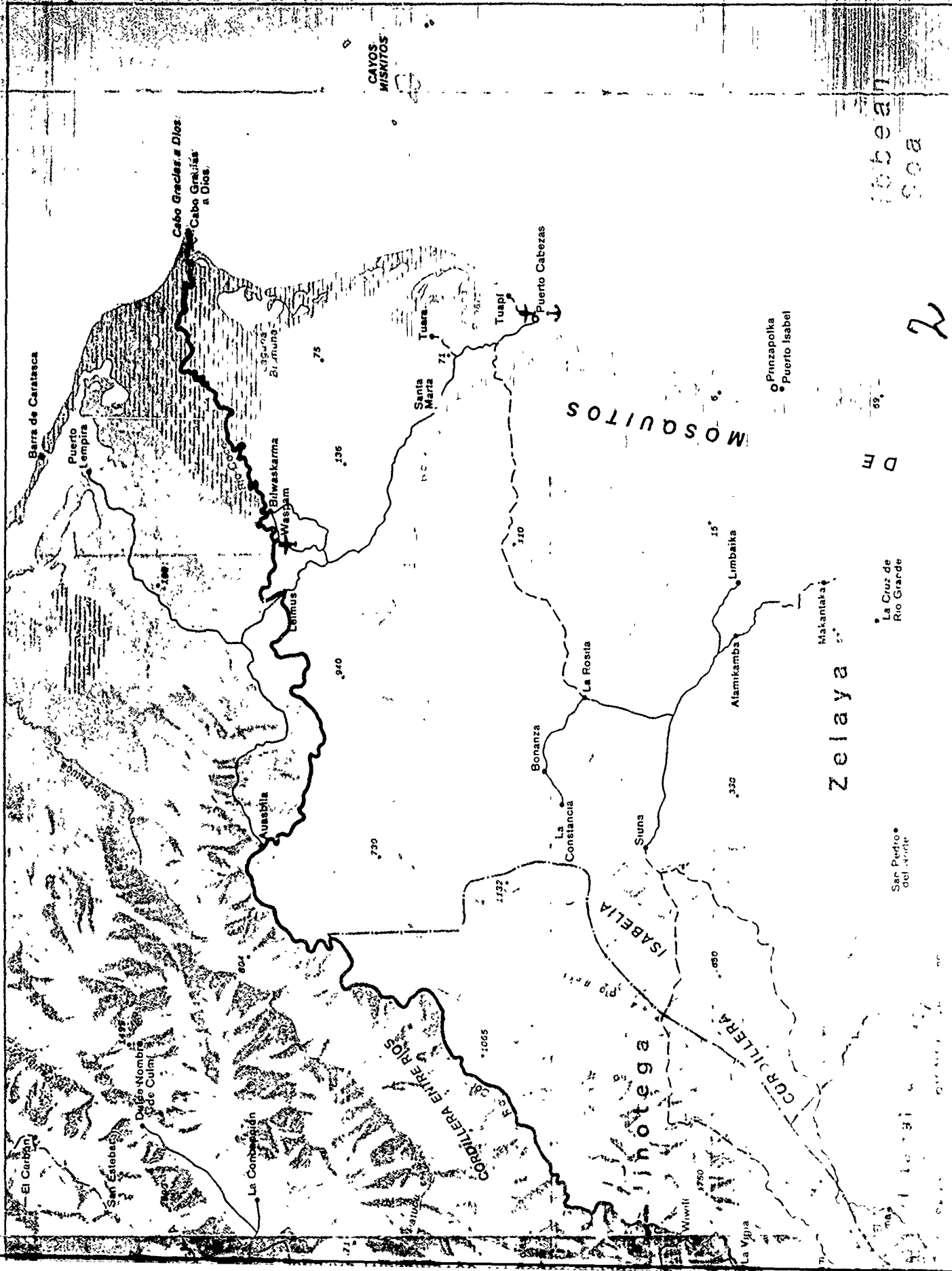
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Zelaya

MOSQUITOS

ISABELIA

CORDILLERA

CORDILLERA ENTRE RIOS

CAYOS
MOSQUITOS

Prinzapolka
Puerto Isabel

La Cruz de
Rio Grande

San Pedro
del Norte

Makaniaka

Limbaika

Alamikamba

Siuna

Bonanza

La Rosita

La Constancia

Wabjam

Gijwaskarma

Awasbilla

Limbaika

La Cruz de

Rio Grande

San Pedro

del Norte

Makaniaka

Alamikamba

Limbaika

Barra de Caratoca

Puerto Lempira

Cabo Gracias a Dios

Puerto Cabezas

Santa Maria

Tuapa

Prinzapolka

Puerto Isabel

La Cruz de Rio Grande

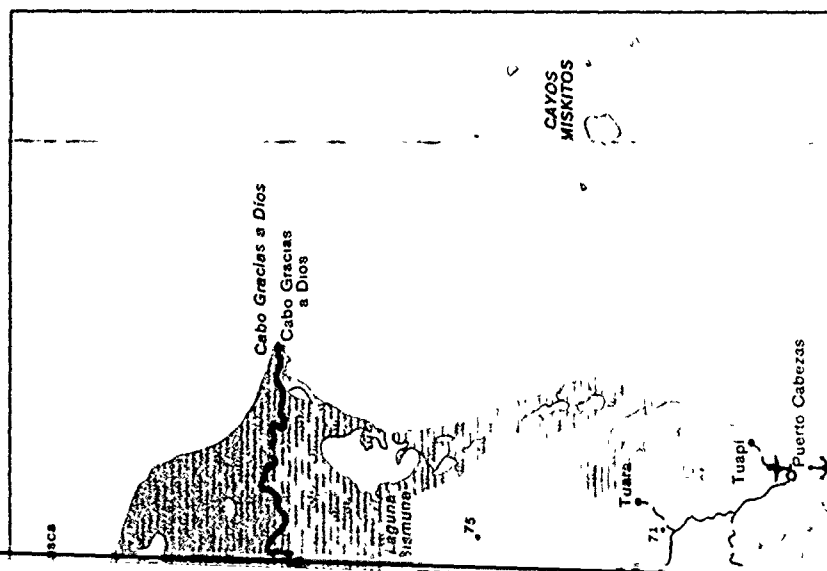
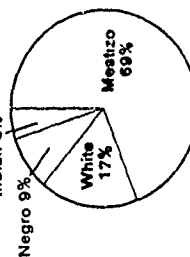
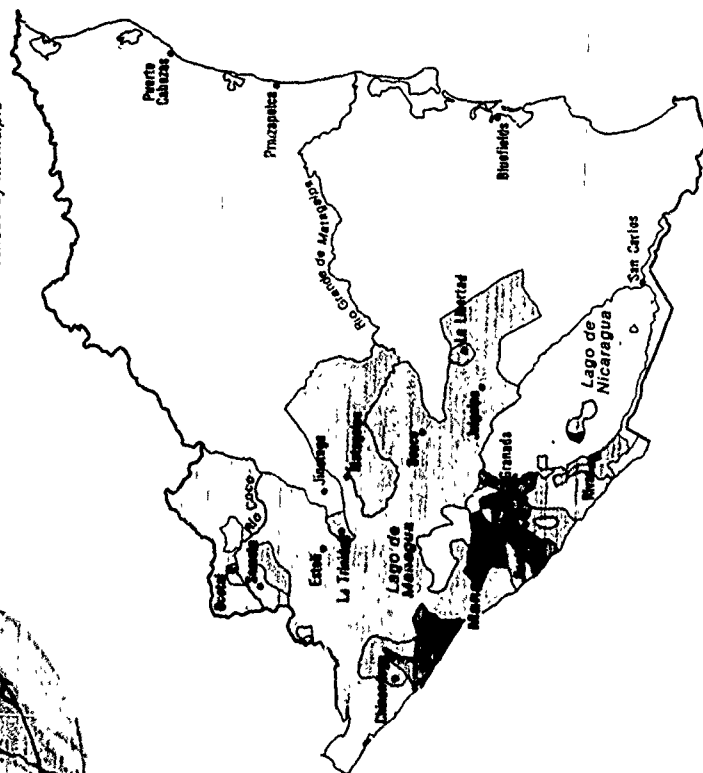
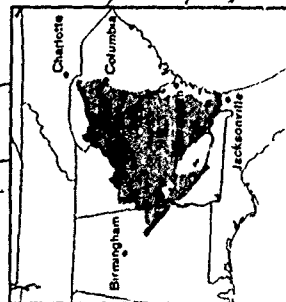
San Pedro del Norte

Makaniaka

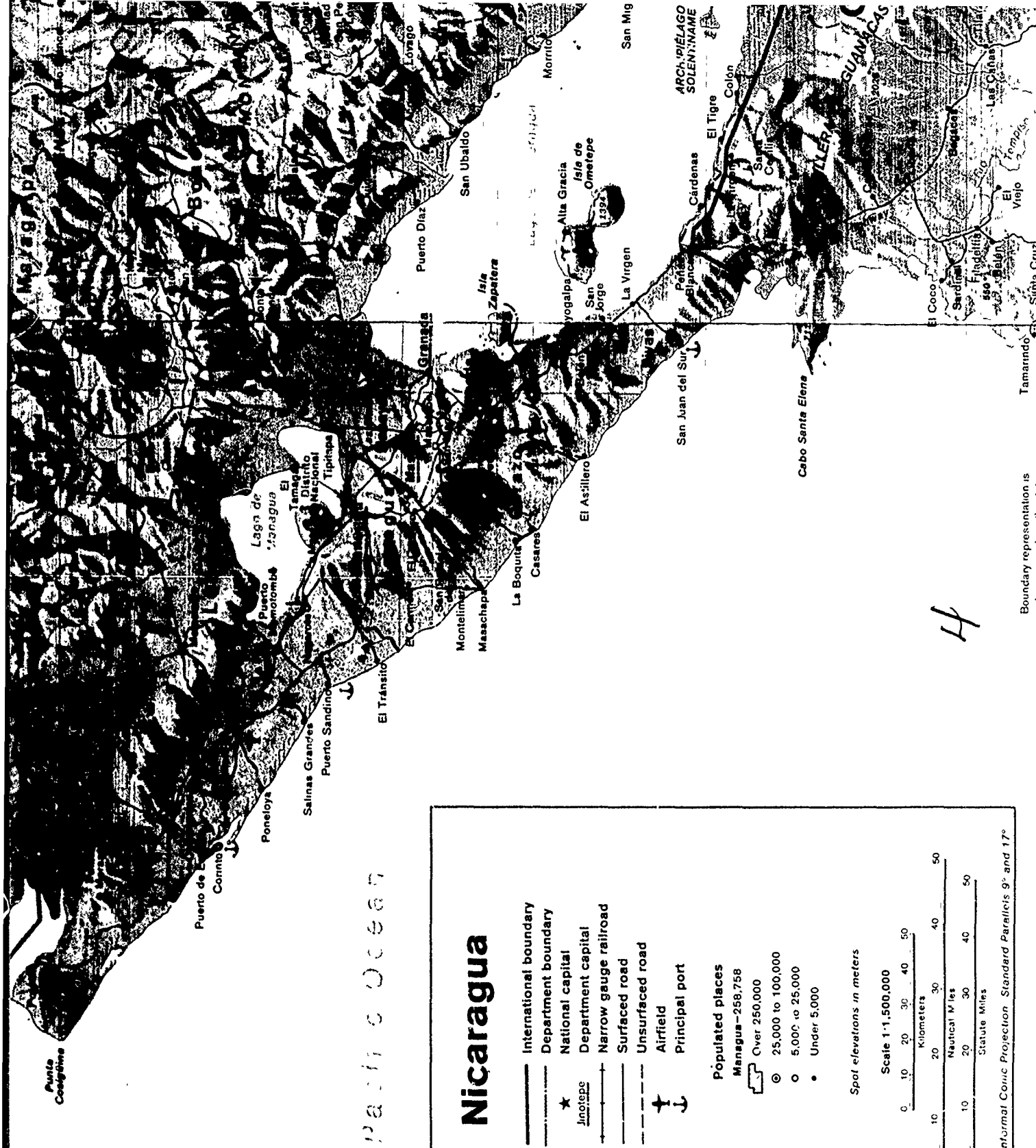
Alamikamba

Limbaika

Siuna

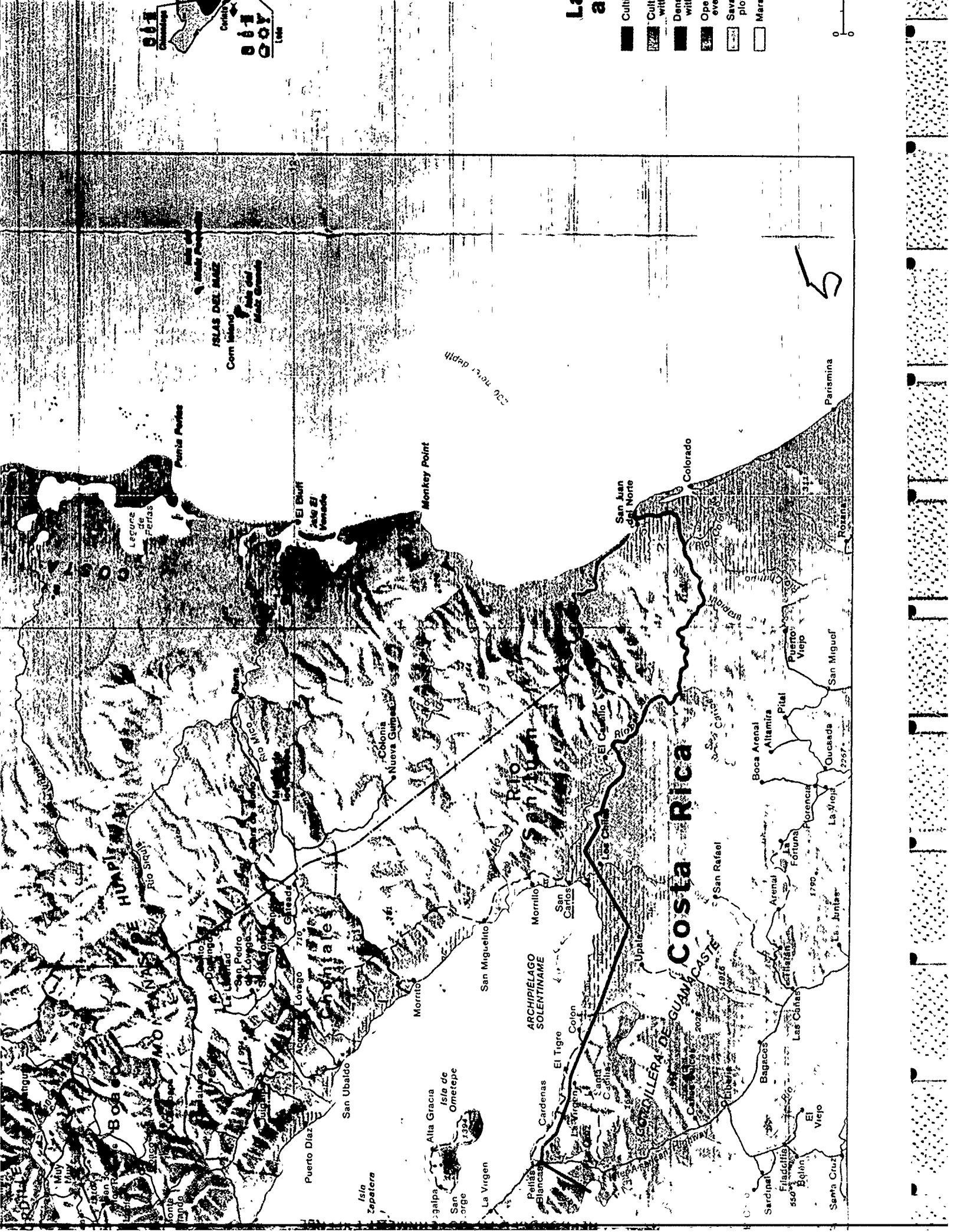


Prinzapinka
Puerto Isabel



4

Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative



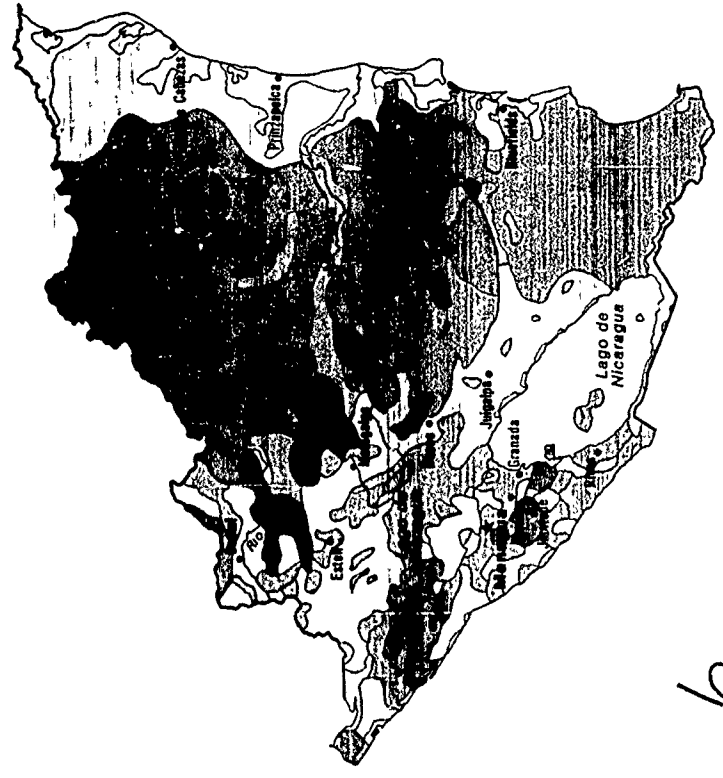
Economic Activity

- INDUSTRY**
- Food processing
 - Textiles and clothing
 - Chemical products
 - Metal products
 - Leather products
 - Petroleum refining
 - Fishing
 - Crude oil pipeline
- AGRICULTURE**
- Coffee
 - Cotton
 - Sugarcane



Land Utilization and Vegetation

- Cultivated area—tree crops; primarily coffee
- Cultivated area—field crops; largely intermixed with pasture, brush, or forest
- Dense woodland; mostly broadleaf evergreen with some pine
- Open woodland; mostly deciduous with some evergreen
- Savanna, grassland with scattered cultivated plots and forest
- Marsh and swamps



b

0 100 Kilometers
0 100 Statute Miles

ISLAS DEL MAIZ
Corn Island
Isla del Maiz Grande
Isla del Maiz Pequeño

Parismina